

SPECIAL MEETING NORTH SMITHFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

JANUARY 8, 2011

KENDALL-DEAN SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

9:00 A.M.

The meeting began at 9:03 A.M. Council members present were Ms. Alves, Mrs. Charest, Mr. McGee, Mr. Zwolenski and Mr. Yazbak. Town Administrator Hamilton and Town Solicitor Nadeau were also present.

School Committee members in attendance were Mrs. Bonas, Mrs. Johannis, Mr. Hemond, Mrs. Narodowy and Mr. Lafleur as well as Superintendent of Schools Stephen Lindberg.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

MOTION by Mrs. Charest, seconded by Ms. Alves, and voted unanimously on an aye vote to enter into executive session at 9:05 A.M. pursuant to RIGL 42-46-5(A)(2) Sessions pertaining to collective bargaining or litigation to discuss 1.) Potential litigation, 2.) NSTA contract negotiations and 3.) NSASSP contract negotiations and also pursuant to RIGL 42-46-5(A)(5) Any discussions or considerations related to the acquisition or lease of real property for public purposes, or of the disposition of publicly held property wherein advanced public information would be detrimental to the interest of the public to discuss a potential lease/purchase of property.

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MOTION by Mrs. Charest, seconded by Mr. McGee, and voted

unanimously on an aye vote to come out of executive session at 10:14 A.M. No motions were made and no votes were taken.

The special meeting resumed at 10:18 A.M.

MOTION by Mrs. Charest, seconded by Ms. Alves, and voted unanimously on an aye vote to seal the minutes of executive session.

The School Committee and the Town Council made a commitment to work together regarding mutual issues.

(Representative Brian Newberry and Senator Marc Cote were present at this time.)

OPERATING/CAPITAL BUDGETS FY 2011 AND FY 2012

School Department Auditor Jeffrey Wadovick made a presentation. Right now the overall projected deficit for 2010/2011 is \$361,000. Mr. Wadovick feels that number is worst case scenario because he believes there are some ways that number will be brought down. The real problem is not this year, but next year.

General state aid was budgeted at \$3.9 million but only came in at \$3,551,000, a loss right from the start of \$378,000.

On the expense side, the school department was given a budget of \$20,618,000 while they had projected \$21,205,000 in expenses.

The real issue is the need to figure out how to make up between \$250,000 and \$350,000 for this year and how to fix the next fiscal year (a projected \$750,000 deficit) and lobby the state to increase funding for the town.

The school department budget is eighty percent salaries and benefits that are contractually driven.

Mr. Lindberg read from a report entitled District Comparison Data prepared by Dr. Maureen Chevrette, Educational Consultant. North Smithfield does not spend as much as comparison districts in any area. The total per pupil expenditure ranked next to last totaling only \$439 more than last place Cumberland. Teachers' salaries were the lowest of the districts for which this data was available. The addition of a step eleven keeps district costs down while remaining below the top step in all communities reported. Despite these budget issues, assessment scores are in the mid-range of the comparison districts.

The eleven comparison districts were chosen for various reasons. Burrillville, Cumberland, Foster-Glocester, Glocester, Lincoln, Smithfield and Woonsocket were included because all are located in northern Rhode Island and familiar to the citizens of North Smithfield.

Narragansett and Scituate were used because both have demographics similar to North Smithfield. Barrington and East Greenwich were included because both are high performing districts

like North Smithfield.

The report also included data regarding total per pupil expenditure, special ed spending per cent to budget, NECAP reading scores and NECAP mathematics scores.

Mr. Yazbak let it be known that the federal government has mandated a better school aid formula and North Smithfield wants that with no further delay.

There was an explanation of the Basic Education Plan, which is a compilation of regulations that a school district must meet to provide each student with a basic, minimum education.

There are areas of regulation where North Smithfield is not in compliance and Dr. Chevrette provided an outline with associated costs.

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HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA SYSTEM

Principal Rob Mezzanotte has gained information from a meeting he attended with the Board of Regents. If regulations are approved, Rhode Island would become a standardized testing state. Students

would have to meet a minimum score in order to get a diploma. This would begin with the class of 2012. Beginning with the class of 2013, the Department of Education is looking to impose a tiered diploma system where students could earn different tiers of diplomas based, primarily, on their test scores. Mr. Mezzanotte's short term concerns include hiring a proficiency co-ordinator and exploring summer school, possibly in conjunction with Smithfield. If Rhode Island becomes a standardized testing state, then long-term concerns are that this is not just a high school concern but a concern that will need to be addressed beginning in kindergarten and continuing through twelfth grade. The state is also transitioning into new standards for reading, writing and math.

No state funding has been provided for this mandate.

(Senator Paul Fogarty arrived at this time.)

WAIVER ON S3050 LIMITATIONS

Mr. Yazbak explained to the audience that the Town Council, the body who sets the budget, is restricted under S3050, which is a Senate bill that was passed about six years ago. The Town is capped at a tax levy increase of no more than 4.25 percent for this year. That has been steadily coming down. Last year there was a vote to allow a one-time override of the cap which meant a 7.75 percent increase to the tax levy.

The Town has an opportunity to bring two fairly large projects on board. One is Dowling Village and the other is National Grid. Although the town does not expect to see any significant taxes from either this year, it does in 2012.

Dowling Village was used as a funding source to pay for the new Middle School. However, the revenue source to fund the school has been delayed. Because of S3050, if Dowling Village and National Grid tax revenue does come forth, the town cannot use it because we will be capped at 4.25 percent this year. The town can take it but then the tax rate will have to be dropped. The Town Council needs the ability to take that money and put it where it was supposed to go. Mr. Yazbak hopes the legislature will be able to help with that.

UNFUNDED MANDATES

Representative Newberry and Senators Cote and Fogarty strongly urged North Smithfield to unite with other suburban communities to ask legislators to act on behalf of the towns. There is a definite strength in numbers.

Mr. Lindberg proposed formation of a Legislative Action Committee.

PERFORMANCE-BASED CONTRACTING

School Committee member Fran Johannis explained the concept of performance-based contracting is to upgrade mechanical structures and to take preventative measures to facilities to help save energy.

The energy savings is what is used to pay the debt that is incurred. Mrs. Johannis showed a computation of how much of the funding the Department of Education will reimburse and how much the school department would be obligated to pay the town back from the energy savings.

The School Committee is looking for a resolution from the Town Council that will allow the school department to keep their annual energy savings to pay the debt.

Mr. Yazbak felt an ordinance would carry more weight. One would be needed for the school side and one for the municipal side.

HALLIWELL SCHOOL

Mrs. Hamilton asked for an update on the status of the school.

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Mrs. Johannis and former Town Councilman Paul Leclerc are part of a group who are identifying all the pros and cons of several options and will present the information to the Town Council, the School Committee and the Town Administrator hopefully in January or February.

MOTION by Mrs. Charest, seconded by Ms. Alves, and voted

unanimously on an aye vote to adjourn at 12:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra A. Todd, Town Clerk